

Statement of John Conyers, Jr.  
Democratic Hearing on “Reauthorization of the PATRIOT Act”  
June 10, 2005

There are few issues that are more important to this Committee or this Congress than the Patriot Act and the war against terror. This not only affects the rights and privacy of every American, but impacts the extent to which our nation is able to hold itself out as a beacon of liberty as we advocate for democracy around the world.

For many of us, this process of hearings is not merely about whether we should extend 16 expiring provisions of the USA Patriot Act; it is about the manner in which our government uses its legal authority to prosecute the war against terror, both domestically and abroad. As we will hear from our witnesses today, those authorities have been abused.

We will learn from Amnesty International about the routine torture and degradation of detainees in American-run prisons that clearly violate American and international law. Both then-White House Counsel Gonzales and the Department of Justice conspired to create an end-run around the international and U.S. laws that criminalize that sort of behavior. While the Justice Department has supposedly reversed those opinions, it still refuses to charge those in its jurisdiction.

We will also receive testimony concerning the illegal detention and mistreatment of individuals at Guantanamo Bay. A federal court has found their detention and denial of legal process to be unconstitutional under the Fifth Amendment and illegal. And after the recent confirmation that jailers there desecrated the Koran, it's clearly time for the military to shut the Guantanamo facility down.

We will also learn about the abuse of the immigration system to unjustifiably detain and harass men of Middle Eastern descent. Our Justice Department held over 1,000 people in the wake of 9/11, and the

Inspector General has found the detentions to violate the law. But no one has been punished, and nothing has been done to ensure it doesn't happen again.

Finally, we will receive testimony concerning the failure of our Administration's racial profiling tactics. Not only are tactics like these immoral, they have been proven to be completely useless in the war on terror. For example, our government's registration of 80,000 Middle Eastern men did nothing but create a deportation nightmare for families who had long been upstanding members of our communities. And not a single terrorist was found. Let me repeat that – not a single terrorist was found.

Yesterday, the president announced with much fanfare that we need to not only reauthorize but expand the Patriot Act. But rather than making us safer, the abuses and excesses of our war against terrorism are actually tarnishing our nation's reputation and making us less safe. The testimony we are receiving today – and introducing into the record – will make that point abundantly clear.